

Hold It Down

Copyright © 2013 by Gina Myers
Published by Coconut Books
www.coconutpoetry.org
All rights reserved
ISBN: 978-1-938055-07-2

Cover by Dietmar Krumrey
Interior by Laura Theobald

Hold It Down

Gina Myers

Coconut Books  Atlanta GA

Contents

Hold It Down	[7]
Something Maybe	[9]
Letter to Gabriella, or How To Leave New York	[11]
So It Goes	[14]
Twenty-Seven: An Inventory	[16]
No Parents No Rules	[18]
Behind the R	[19]
No News Today	[46]
Daily Vitamin	[47]
I Like All the Predictable Songs	[48]
Hold It Down	[49]
Strange Eruptions	[50]
Hold It Down	[51]

September Requiem [52]

Starting Over [58]

Static [59]

Memorial [60]

False Spring [61]

Household Fires [88]

Response [89]

Lament [90]

Morning Poem [91]

Hold It Down [93]

Hold It Down [96]

Acknowledgments [100]

Hold It Down

Everything grapples
with the decision to go
on. My work not done.
Blue skies stretch
before me, slight
breeze shakes trees.
My first Georgia
spring learning
what dogwood is.
I said it's easy to write
a poem about something
other than yourself
but still I turn to this.
Yes, it's 2012 & nothing
has really changed
since last year.
I don't want to make
pronouncements
about American history.

I only want to love
my neighbor & do
no harm.

Something Maybe

The curve of her spine bent
along subway lines. The only thing
that makes sense is to lie down
on the sidewalk right now.
Beer can crushed & tossed across
the street. We're not going to make it.
For an entire summer my life's
solution was to not leave
my bed. A thousand miles later
& I still want something else.
Shifty & shifting away from the center.
It's clear now: we were never
going to make it. The darkness creeps
over, smears in the rain. The end
of the night means leaving the bar.
Myself keeping my self in check.
Sometimes I want to go back
& do things differently
but this is one fuck-up I can't take
back. *Pink Moon. Pink Moon.*

Pink Moon. Pink Moon.

Hit play again. Lying in bed, feel
the darkness creep over.

Let the weird back in. Find a point
in the distance, fast and furious,
something worth racing to.

I'm looking for something new,
something catchy, something
to fall asleep to.

Letter to Gabriella, or How to Leave New York

Nothing has changed or everything has,
but it remains the same in the city.
It could have been a day, a week, or three
years. It could have been something
magical. I know how you feel & I tell
you everything will be okay, even though
I'm not too sure myself. Up to our elbows
in bleach, scrubbing away a year,
drinking away memories of last night.
I awoke in the cab to find I'd given
the wrong address, looked up at a building
I hadn't been in in five years.
Sometimes I only remember things
in short bursts. That first night.
Those last six months. Speaking in
our private language, I thought I could
give you a set of instructions on how to leave.
A kitchen table does not make a home.
The birds became sick & the radio

was my best friend. Every night
was a party & slowly dying, I was
feeling the same things you're feeling
right now. During this drawn out goodbye,
everyone will want to be your friend.
Two weeks later, most will have already forgotten.
But it's better to be forgotten than to be miserable.
It's okay to leave, to want to leave.
You don't have to explain it to anyone.
My life is not glamorous, will never be so.
Let's stop pretending. Sometimes
we get so caught up with looking back.
It's easy to obsess over the bad things:
feeling used & discarded. A new city
awaits & there is no promise
it will be better, only different.
I continue to make the same mistakes,
but I feel like myself again. Your pain
echoes my pain & I feel like this is happening
all over. The tape stuck on rewind.
My slow fade out matches your slow fade out,

a ghost stitched to a ghost, listening
to Morrissey & waiting for the bars to open,
waiting to forget it all & be everyone's best friend.

So It Goes

Late-September, summerlike.

I remember you walked your bike
along Ludlow, & later in the cab

our knees touching. I forgot
my lucky bandana I had worn
around my neck. I forgot

so many things I meant
to remember. Earlier, Coney Island.
Sitting on the boardwalk watching

the waves come in. The slight
removal of the camera lens
& the bar top. There was always

something coming between us.
Sunday night, blurred lights. Trying
to remember what this felt like.

I remember I tried to draw
a picture for you so you could see it
like I saw it. Everything we had

was half-lived, half-made up.
The bandana wasn't really lucky—
I just liked it, worn & carried through

the years. So let's just forget it all: pour me
another drink & tattoo another skull
to your arm. The end of whatever it was

was written in the beginning like every
promise I've ever made, a tiny death
etched into my autobiography.

Twenty-Seven: An Inventory

915 gnats build a nest in my ankle.
A single fan. A mattress on the floor.
At least 2 mice seen. Another key to hang
from my belt. 19 keys mean
I can enter 5 mailboxes, 7 apartments,
2 offices & 2 elevators. I keep 3 keys
of unknown origins & currently 9 bruises
of unknown origins: 4 on my right leg,
1 on my right hip-bone, 2 on my left arm,
1 on my right elbow & 1 on my left knee.
3 small cuts on my right hand.
I have 5 hours to myself today.
Someone else's curtains hang in my windows.
The box on the floor is my box.
In my dreams there is always 1 white rat
with red eyes. It's bitten me 3 nights in a row.
I have 1 mom, 1 dad, & 1 brother.
It's been 373 days since I saw them,
except my brother: 1,089 days.
3 months of stoicism lost

in a single night's collapse.
The mistakes more than I can count.
The imagined gunshots out my window
really just the rattling of my box fan.
But the dogs barking & voices yelling are real.

No Parents No Rules

Not more deep, more shallow.

You take what you can.

Monday morning: pot of coffee.

It's a dead kid who rats on another kid.

New media schizophrenia.

Dear cloud free from moral guilt.

I walk down the street & something happens, or doesn't.

May 23, 1987, game three Eastern Conference finals:

Bird drives the lane & Laimbeer lays his ass down.

Five-dollar pitchers of Blatz & Sam Cooke on the jukebox.

A door leads to a door leads to another door.

Deepinsnow. Living in a city. *Eepinnow.* To live in a city.

I get good advice from the advertising world.

For example: this & this & this.

An obsession w /the morning news.

Ten-cent wing night.

He do the police in different voices.

Rust Belt restlessness. Post-industrial Michigan.

Telling the same story over & over.

This doesn't explain anything.

Behind the R

Trying to remember three things about today:

- 1) snow.
- 2) the newspaper half-covered in snow.
- 3)

Every left turn, a right turn.
Everything is bought & sold.
Every street is a vagrancy.
Every timecard & name on the wall.
The sign points to the last exit
& the right to refuse service.
Žižek: *We “feel free” because
we lack the very language
to articulate our unfreedom.*

We advise you to buy today
Monday morning hangover
Remove unwanted hair
Time is limited
Tuesday morning hangover
Thank you for your order
Get more for your membership
starting with a free \$25 gift card
Wednesday morning hangover
Healthy life your dream?
You are pre-approved
Pre-approved Thursday morning
Hangover dancing with the stars
The church of the holy redeemer
Friday morning
\$3.00 delivery charge
10% sales tax
18% service fee

morning becomes electric on the B61
bus & for a minute I forget
that I've forgotten
what I'm waiting for
nothing more than the promise
of a bus schedule
sixty cent cup of coffee
people shuffle along Atlantic Avenue
the shop gates closed

I hope you're not working at work.
The bruised wreckage of a self in the world.
Everyday in everyway. America equals ghost.
Anywhere USA, Nowhere Brooklyn.
Neighborhood lockdown. Free society
& a side of fries. The people move in & out of
the security camera's range.
A new streetlight employed to fight blight.
Counter the problems with lower expectations &
countertops too high to reach.
I once told you I don't look forward
to anything. That's not quite
true. What I look forward to is, is—

A partial list of fears:

fear of voids or empty spaces

fear of time travel

fear of waves or wave-like motions

fear of hearing good news

fear of swallowing or being eaten

fear of the knee bending backwards

fear of machines or of robots

fear of nihilism

fear of rain or of being rained on

Today:

woke

breakfast

showered

made coffee

read

etc.

Another beheading, more bombings.
Someone is poisoning all the dogs in the neighborhood.
Streetlight bends backwards into hands. The children
run & sing. A knee scrapes pavement.
Heat rises from sidewalks, radiates from the buildings:
glass ovens & brick
ovens, blacktop & concrete.
A 93-year-old woman was found dead in her apartment.
Tonight another shooting. Another building burns & another
tomorrow. We open the hydrants
& wait for the flood. We tie our shoes together,
toss them over the wires.

I wanted to write
a poem about Red Hook, instead
could only write about the bus.
I wish I could read on the bus—
motion sickness & crosswalks,
park here, Bad Apple
Bail Bonds, flashing lights &
the irresponsibility of a city.

behind the window pane of the hotel
behind the locked gate of the construction site
behind the abandoned lot
behind the display case at the deli
behind the sign at the pier
behind the schoolyard & bus stop
behind the newspaper & newspaper stand
behind the map on the wall

At work we are at war with the mice. At home we are at war with the cockroaches. In the papers the new war replaced the old war. New names in the headlines replaced the old names in the headlines. The traffic stopped & flowed as usual. The new tenants replaced the old tenants. The bus arrived on time & the banks kept their hours. An occasional argument was overheard, a disruption at the coffee shop, a few additional bag searches on the subway. And things would go on this way when this new war was replaced by another war.

Today: opening my bag for the police search & the looks of
other passengers. Suspicion cast then tossed away in ill
subway lighting & that morning's letter to the editor in *AM
New York: I don't have anything to hide so why should I care.*
On the bus, I no longer felt angry. Riding west on Atlantic
into the sunset, I no longer felt anything at all
forgetting *there are still millions*
forgetting— *of suns left*

still the abandoned streetcars at the end of Van Brunt
spider web windshield & slow rust
weeds bent through tracks
brick streets & eyes cast to sea
over the East River sails & tugboats
water taxi tours past
the statue of liberty dilapidated
factory
crumbling into the water
small town Brooklyn
or anywhere

behind the dirty ashtray on the coffee table
behind the post-it note on the door
behind the open hydrant
behind the headline on the front page
behind the stray spark catching fire

Behind the R the sun is setting
on the statue of liberty
a cruise liner docks three blocks
from the projects
wild dogs roam the streets

my daily nosebleed king
of beers obituaries & barbiturates
another family reunion to catch
a predator debt consolidation
operation chastise bought a purse
& stopped taking my daily vitamin
the great anticipations don't
hesitate & miss out treat
as urgent & confidential
to steal & repeat the lesson
hitting home cum & cum
again click here for a great
stocking stuffer idea click here
to track your order this change
may result in significantly
higher monthly payments
to secure your interest rate
contact us directly
aged angst I was wrong
the story of my life

Today's soundtrack to my morning commute: Marvin Gaye & the MC5. In the news: death toll from the latest tsunami that hit Indonesia, death toll in Lebanon & Israel, death toll in Iraq & Afghanistan. The temperatures push past 95, edge towards 100. Overheard on the bus: *I'm on my last nerve*. Everything bubbling, ready to burst.

Rentals make homeowners
nervous. As if everyone
could own a home.
Or for that matter
have health insurance.
The soft politics
of the uninsured youth.
We won't raise
our voices too loud.
In the jungle
of the new economy,
*victory will be
for those who create
disorder
without loving it.*

A partial list of fears, continued:

fear of picnics

fear of taking tests

fear of being buried alive or of cemeteries

fear of symmetry

fear of the color red

fear of being tickled by feathers

fear of writing in public

You asked when it would stop raining & it stopped raining. I thought if I could tell the story it would make things easier. The smell of raw sewage rising from the street. Building towards a better future, one with a living room & a sofa, framed pictures on the wall. Every poem is a love poem. Every space cleared is filled. Last month I got a new credit card & didn't pay the electric bill.

Sometimes your environment makes you hate yourself.
Trading fresh air for underground passage. The slow lurch
of the F train: stop & start. Stumble off balance. 7:15am.
Another day: *only that*.

Lethem: *Brooklyn a mind-
state peeling further
from Manhattan
each day, like continental
drift.* Only rain
this winter, no snow.
Clouds replace
clear skies replace
skyline & clock tower.

I bought a book on how to fix everything.
December heat wave, creaky door,
worn out heel, new media
schizophrenia, unknown melancholy
& back-to-work anxiety.
The change I can count on
is the buck fifty worth of quarters
in my pocket. Sunday. Laundry day.

January 6, 2007

70 degrees. Red Hook, Brooklyn.

When I die, I want my ashes dumped off pier 41.

Last will and testament.

Gina Myers

A partial list of fears, continued:

fear of crosses or of crucifixes

fear of the figure 8

fear of the color blue

fear of crowded rooms

fear of empty rooms

fear of dizziness or whirlpools

fear of dining or dinner conversation

I thought if I hung a picture of my childhood home in my new apartment it would make this home. I thought a layer of paint would change everything, make me forget this wandering. Whitman: *Missing me one place search another, / I stop somewhere waiting for you.*

No News Today

Once, no news was good news & we enjoyed our perpetual waiting. The longer we waited, the better it was. Now, no news is bad news & the only news we know. Like that month in college when all I ate were ramen noodles & was able to whittle my intake down to two packages a day. I remember reading a line in a poem that said something about cleaning yesterday's mistake from the stove & underlining it—that seemed like news, the kind of news you can free yourself from. Just wipe it clean. The daily paper is gone & with it the comfort of community notes & box scores. There have been no engagements, no birth announcements, no weddings, no deaths. The weather report no longer forecasts the week, instead breaks down the past 24 hours for those of us who remained indoors & forgot to look out a window. My morning routine, obsolete. Post-breakfast analysis coming up at the top of the hour.

Daily Vitamin

I'm sorry for everything. There's no way
to hold my arm that doesn't hurt. I'm too busy

to be busy, so let's do lunch. Hello, cubicle.
This is what we always fought against.

I told myself that I would remember
what you said, but I forgot. Forget it.

I will never be young again & neither will you,
so cyber-stalk your way to my heart.

I'm trying to make the best out of the morning.
I can't explain the blood—it's just there sometimes.

I Like All the Predictable Songs

In my life I make all the predictable moves:
date the wrong men & develop all the obvious
addictions. The ordinariness of it is tragic,
I think to myself as I sit at the bar, dressed in black,
sipping whiskey. Every poem needs a soundtrack,
& this one has a lot of Johnny Cash on it.
Common, I know. The trouble I find myself in
is completely expected. My thoughts consumed
by bills & the men who claim to love me.
I am heading for disaster, a crash & burn so bright
& brilliant & completely unnoteworthy.

Hold It Down

New recipes combined
w/ the wonder I've kept
myself alive this long.
Autumn stretches before us
as every autumn has done
before. Losing my life
to rush hour. *Ride MARTA,*
it's smarta. Everything streaked
in rain. I look through
my greasy reflection
in the smudged bus window.
The squeaky brakes, mid-
week hustle & slow collapse.
Everything is grey.
Filling the space w/ whatever
fits. Three hundred tiny noises
to keep me awake at night.

Strange Eruptions

Friday afternoon & radio
playing oldies in the background
beer & leftover Chinese
late September at the window
but something more, strange
expectation, a need to throw
this life away / too much shit
doo-wop, doo-wop, my baby
yesterday's newspaper tossed
on the floor / feeling blood
rush to burst from my fingers
erupt, demanding something new
there must be something
doo-wop, doo-wop, my baby

Hold It Down

trick shot bottom
I haven't had whiskey in months
using calendar pages
as scrap paper any measurement of time
add another digit to the year
nothing's changed
more bodies come in the door crowd out
my sunlight happy hour
dollar-fifty bottles
what day is it? Tuesday?
each year I get older things become less
certain this isn't how
I imagined it would be

September Requiem

day dark & wind
pushing tree limbs
across my apartment
window / fighting
against the thoughts
inside my head
my anger too large
for my fist / grey sky
expansive over
abandoned factory
rusted out car /
what I have
versus what I want
trying to convince
myself that somehow
this is worth it / hum
of inadequacy
the sound of a city
ripped in half
burning & burning

each night
throw it all away
September
& old ghosts to keep
me company
Friday night
the radio / the radio
the radio

*

autumn pushes
past the brink /
weeds through
cracked sidewalks
broken parking lots
a tree breaking
through floorboards
pushing its limbs
bent up against walls
collapsed ceiling
everything either
rising or falling

pushing / up
pushing down
golden in afternoon
sunlight

*

it seems easy
to leave / easy
to start again
/ better
elsewhere
don't dig in
or you'll just
disappoint people
when you leave
you're always
leaving
you're always
saying no / no
this isn't it
this city doesn't
need me / doesn't

need saving
let it burn

*

how many years
can this go on?
every September
the days pile up
& are x'd out
to-do lists
never completed
turning away from
everyone else /
you turn inside
yourself / think
no one is there for you
no one can help /
place your
possessions in boxes
throw out
the sweatshirt with
holes worn in the elbows

what scares you is
this: you don't know
where the anger
comes from /
you don't know
how to fix it
you're supposed
to know
how to fix it

*

crisp night air
following a warm day
the whole city
a ghost town
you can drive
the wrong way
down the street
no one is there
to notice / in
the air it feels
like something

is changing / street
after street
of boarded up
buildings
empty bus stop
the sky / the sky

Starting Over

I want to know your opinion
of every movie you've ever seen.
The worst part of the night is its end.
In every version of this story
the days progress & I wind up a mess.
I shoulder the past & take the blame
& move forward into a future
that will never quite pan out.
I shoulder this responsibility.
Perhaps this time will be different.
I believe in the constant shedding
of everything I acquire.
This is my mantra, my daily devotion.
This is something quite different.

Static

I am tired of this accidental ghost.
No more static, no more aching
in my teeth. Words break
open in unbecoming postures,
write over leaves & trees.
This bad reception dictates a new
pattern of separation, the exact distance
from me to you, or what we once wanted.
The knocking in the wind won't stop.
There is no fix here, no easy alibi.
The pages turn to dust in our hands.

Memorial

for J

In my life so much happens
that I would like to write about,
but then something else happens
& things are always happening.
You, my friend, are underground
& will always be there. I did not
help you, but you always helped me.
When I was an atheist, I believed
in people. Now as a nihilist, my grief
has no hope. And I could say
there is no reason to keep going,
but then I think of, I think of you.

False Spring

One week ago, 85 degrees & sunny.
Now: snow falls on the daffodils.
Typical Michigan behavior. Tornadoes
sweep through the southern states.
Nuclear catastrophe in Japan.
Protests everywhere. My personal rejection
of the life I've been living. The dream
is of the open road. To feel unfettered.
Instead, I spent all night reading.

Late afternoon sun casts long shadows
across the pavement. My coffee cup empty.
Time to figure out what comes next,
but not too far. Only this, dinner.
The night's end. A six-pack of Budweiser.
At the wedding, the DJ asked if you
were my husband. You're on a flight
to L.A. right now. I'm not sure when
I'll see you next.

Sometimes when I think I'm being
charming, I'm really being an asshole.
Another fine moment in the history
of happy hours. Monday turns into Tuesday
& Tuesday to Wednesday & there was a time
when I could go three days without sleep.
But now it seems I am always tired.
Looking out the apartment window, the city
looks dead. In the distance, an occasional train whistle.

Sometimes I forget that this is home,
that when I lived elsewhere, this
is what I wanted to come back to.
Even dreamed of. Now: dreaming
of something else. 24 down, 26 to go.
The map on the wall shaded to show
which states I've been to. The older
I get, the further away it all feels.

Late night sore throat. Now, morning,
a song I've never heard on the radio
& birdsong at the window. The smell
of false spring fools everyone
into thinking things are going to be okay.
As if I can ignore the news, or not think
about tomorrow, or not look at my bank account.
Sometimes, I suppose, this can be enough.

We can make this work. I got the idea from a tv show about an FBI detective & a forensic anthropologist, though I still question the distance. I never outgrow doing stupid things like the night I lost my glasses & drove from Detroit through fog & rain, all for a tattoo I didn't really have the time or money for. My life a history of misplaced priorities.

False spring adds a bounce to my step.
For seven weeks, you'll be away for work
& I'll start out by sleeping
on my side of the bed, but slowly
I'll reclaim the whole thing
& when you come home I'll have to
get used to you all over again. One month
later, you'll leave again. True spring
will be here. Maybe even summer.

Every year I record in a journal:
April snow. So April snow this year too.
Breaking up with my hometown is hard
to do. Even this blood-stained city
has a firm hold on me. A year in my life
where the only good thing was you.
Everything else fallen away.
False spring will not heal me. I continue
to allow myself to be fooled. I am April's fool.

The pain in my side persists. A year
of medical exams & mounting bills.
Last year this time: W was diagnosed
with cancer. She died on Father's
Day. Sometimes I imagine the relief
death brings, not to be melodramatic,
more matter-of-factly. In spring I'm supposed
to think about rebirth. Instead, empty lots
of dead grass & Eliot's planted corpses.

The buds suspiciously missing
from the tree outside my apartment
window. At night, I lie in bed
& listen to gun shots. We really
became lost when we accepted this
as normal. As it gets warmer,
things heat up—more people
on the street. Signs of summer:
tulips, baseball, & violence.

To one fan's dismay and another's joy,
the game winning shot plays again
& again on the highlight reel.
Hotel life. Next night a different city.
The local news says there's a man
handing out one-hundred dollar bills
outside of the Sav-a-Lot in Saginaw.
In other news: Koran burnings. The suspects
in S's murder were pictured in the paper today.

I'm trying to understand how it all goes together. I mean, if nothing around me makes sense, how can I make sense of my own life? At the Bed, Bath & Beyond, shopping for a wedding gift, I see so many things I never knew I needed. Household items the first to go when I am ready to leave, when it's going to be too much to carry. Like these thoughts, too much to carry.

Leave it behind. Leave these thoughts
behind at the bar, in the bottom of a drink,
or leave them in my dreams, kept safely
in my sleep & forgotten upon waking.
I was so excited to give you the book
I knew you'd like, that I never finished
reading it myself. False spring is full
of distraction & impulse. No need to think
of the future or carry things through.

This morning began with snow;
the sun at noon had melted it all.
Now hail hits against the window
& the super has turned the heat back
on in the building. I realize this story
could take place in Chicago, Buffalo,
Cleveland, Philadelphia, or an assortment
of other places. But these days
my thoughts always wrestle with Saginaw.

Power out & I am alone here
missing you, wherever on the road you
are now. Earlier you called & told me
about the bad accident you saw.
Sometimes I get sick of all the news
I read & hear & I fear the people
are losing & what the hell kind of life
is this anyway? Now: quiet & candlelight.
Looking down at the street. Nothing moves.

Tomorrow after work is weekly beer
& nacho night with K. Work-talk & gossip
of friends from college. Draft specials.
Mid-week. It's these little things
that keep me going. Two hours scheduled
to step away from everything & then
it's back at the grind. I'll return home
to go back to work. This is my life,
this is my life, this is my fucking life.

Hoodie weather. The clouds like a painting.
Sick all week. Pacing the floor & sleeping,
thoughts too slow & restless to get anything done.
I woke from today's fever dream to
a fire alarm & a fire on the floor beneath me.
It was extinguished & the smoke cleared.
Everyone here is safe. Minor inconvenience
not worth complaining about. The latest reports
say over 200 dead in Alabama alone.

Early obsession with box scores. Strands
of information piecing together a life.
The boys of spring will become the boys
of summer & then the boys of fall.
Checking updates on my phone.
24/7 need to be connected, changing
my sleep schedule to better fit information
flow. This is my life, this is my life.

Weddings & funerals in the span of a week.
Each year, the family grows & shrinks.
I search the classifieds for a new job,
a new place to live, a change. This happens
every two-to-three years, but I imagine
three years from now I'll be too old to keep
this up. I should settle down, start a family,
do all those things that people once
expected from me. Basically, give up.

Car horn breaks the early morning quiet.
Starting at eight a.m., the church bells ring
on the hour every hour. Today: the cars line
up for a funeral procession as I look down
from my apartment window. When W
died, she wanted no funeral, no memorial,
no obituary in the paper. There is no closure.
Every so often, the feeling of loss smacks fresh
as I recall, as if for the first time, she's gone.

When you're away, I enjoy the solitude.
I get so much done, which sounds terrible
I know. But when you're home, I want
to spend all my time with you, just hanging
out, doing whatever, it doesn't matter.
It's only been two weeks since you left
on this seven-week tour. My apartment
is clean, I'm caught up on work, I'm
having a beer & waiting for you to call.

I usually prefer breakup poems
to love poems. It's funny how things
just happen. Something unplanned
comes together despite one's own self.
One's own habit of ruining things.
Packing up clothes to take to the
Salvation Army, I can't help but feel
hopeful. Spring cleaning & all that nonsense.
As if one can just wipe away the winter.

Listening to a radio program called
“Living with the Blues.” If I could survive
here, with these simple wants, I’d be happy.
I just want to listen to music, read books,
eat food, drink beer & occasionally whiskey,
dance, & travel, see my friends & spend
my time with you. It sounds like I’m fifteen,
believing this could actually be possible.
The Idiot’s Guide to Living.

Unexpected doctor's appointment has me sweating next month's rent. I've never learned how to get ahead. In Saginaw, there are people working to make it better, community organizing, planting trees & gardens, cleaning up, trying to battle the perception that this place isn't worth anything. That a life here isn't worth anything. Still, I feel more disconnected each day. Always dreaming of running away.

There's nothing that says this has to end, but everything ends. This month's practice becoming routine, a way to pass the day as good as any other I know. The art gallery closed. There are fewer places that feel welcoming each day. Boom & bust, minus the boom. Michigan proclaimed dead over & over again in the news, but what about those of us who still live here? Is this living?

The death toll continues to rise. My friends displaced. Trees destroyed part of M's house but everyone is safe. I'd like to get a dog as long as it would never die. Today: the clouds like a tattoo. W believed she was going to get better. For weeks after her death packages arrived in the mail—all things she'd ordered before she was on hospice: a vegetable steamer, a juicer, a new healthy life.

Last day of April. Early morning sun,
open windows & birdsong. Saturday quiet
as the city sleeps in. Momentary stillness.
A cup of coffee & a book equals peace.
At least right now. The temporariness of it all
doesn't matter. True spring on the horizon.
The mistake of placing hope in seasons,
to look forward to the days to come &
expect things to be better.

—*Saginaw, April 2011*

Household Fires

We weren't promised a summer
but expected one anyway.
This certain weakness of ours

was nearly imperceptible.
The bridge when it fails
fails gently. The pain I feel

is something I feel. The sick
glow of the streetlight
through the blinds. The weekend

refuses. When there's a warning,
nothing happens.
Trapped inside these walls,

smoke gathers at the ceiling.
This didn't turn into a love story,
but we don't have regrets.

Response

I haven't yet scraped
all the mud from my shoes.
Please forgive me—
it appears I've ruined
your welcome mat.
Sometimes I wonder
how I got myself
into this mess. It's October
& all the books are jumping
off the shelves. They've
tightened the security,
the most subtle of suicides.
The faces of the clocks
bend backwards & I'm stuck
here mid-gesture, in this
pause of slight regret.

Lament

Everything broken is still broken.
Fuck making the best of a Monday.
I'm not saying the things I set out to say.
But when night comes I know one thing
to be true: I will be able to fall asleep,
or I will not be able to fall asleep.

Morning Poem

This is how I will be found.
Windows open & all the lights
left on. Sometimes in the evening
it's like *that's it* & I'm gone.
You won't know where to look
but come every Monday it's back
to the same responsibilities.
Sometimes things just aren't
the same anymore but then
sometimes they are. What's going
on. I'm not angry at my father.
I am here now at the start
of a new day, not optimistic
in the symbolism of "a new day"
but content here with this cup
of coffee & the enormity of the future
before us all, unknown, wild.
Shrugged off last night's debate
like a sick grey fog clouding
the radio this morning,

clouding my thoughts cast
out toward sea, to another somewhere,
or to an idea of a better past.
Like a ghost I will come
to haunt those streets again.
My love knows I've not been myself.
Listen to him now in the other room,
the mattress creaks beneath him
as he turns in his sleep, as I
sit here without sleep, sitting before
whatever it is that lies ahead.

Hold It Down

It's 70 degrees outside but in the drugstore
Christmas music plays over the speakers as
I stand in line balancing my checkbook
in my head, stretching things thin until
my next paycheck when the rent is due.
The security guard cracks a joke, but
I wasn't paying attention, so I just smile
& step forward in line. Images move
across the screen. When I think about money
it seems impossible. All over the country
people are moving into the streets
& we're here in Atlanta starting a new life.
Darkness surrounds the latest revision
of our shared history. Everything clouded.
Yesterday I couldn't tear myself from the news
& already today the events have been distorted,
the numbers downplayed. It's late fall
& in the early morning crispness, the leaves
fall from the trees & cover the sidewalks.
This new feeling we lack a name for, struggle

manifested in the streets & in parks & on bridges
across the nation. The headlines read
“Protesters clash with police,” but as we watched
the live stream, we saw aggression only by officers
dressed in riot gear. We saw people tossed
on the ground, hit with batons,
a woman punched in the face, an eighty-four year old
woman’s face drenched in pepper spray.
The images endless in this land of the free.
I’m losing focus, distracted by the newsfeed
on the computer screen, hitting refresh.
The cat paws at my leg, demands its own attention.
This shift entirely unexpected but necessary.
Leaves blot the window. Every so often
I leave & start from scratch, imagine
damaged relationships & sick cities
where there was no damage & no sickness
greater than anywhere else. In Atlanta,
everyone drives. The bartender called us
“hardcore” when we said we’d walked there.
She said, “No one in Atlanta walks anywhere.”
Walking home from work in post-daylight

savings time darkness I pass no one on the
sidewalks. I pass the traffic backed up by
the stoplight. The weekend passes too quickly—
I wish it would last longer, which is what this all
is really about: time & my lack of control
over it, my inability to do what I want with it.
And there's a greater futility at work
here too—a greater frustration in my inability
to control my environment or to stop my country
from killing its citizens. The police beat people
standing still, linking arms, holding cardboard signs.
Each day I think more & more about the past,
about where things began to go wrong, where I, too,
began to go wrong. Before I moved, before I
got sick, before I unfriended you on Facebook,
before I decided I no longer loved you,
before New York, before college—thinking back
to childhood when we could run fearless
through the neighborhood at night, when
we didn't think about the future, when we loved
our country because we didn't know better.

Hold It Down

for N & K

Otis on vinyl
carries from
the barn. Blessed
is this day. The camera
captures us youthful
& triumphant.
Blessed be this day,
a celebration
of friends coming
together. Last night,
surrounded by
those I love, I had wanted
to read Berrigan's
"Words For Love,"
but I didn't want to say
the heart breaks, even
though I know
it's true & the breaking
can be a good thing

sometimes, like the way
my heart shatters
a little each time
I think of my friends
& how lucky in life
I've been to get
to know them, to have
had the time to laugh &
drink & dance & to argue
& feel hurt too.
How can one possibly
say everything
that should be said?
These feelings are
just feelings, not
defined by words.
To be overwhelmed,
caught in a whirlwind
& up to one's
ankles in the creek
as lightning bugs
polka-dot the sky

& Otis, again Otis,
always Otis in my
memory, provides
the soundtrack.
Not every day
can be a good day
but this is one
of them, one
of the best days.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the editors at the journals where some of these poems originally appeared, occasionally in different forms and under different titles: *Academy of American Poets (poets.org)*, *all small caps*, *Bone Bouquet*, *Country Music*, *Ekleksographia*, *H_NGM_N*, *Ilk Journal*, *Mirage #4/Period(ical)*, *Moria*, *Robert Lopez's No News Today project*, *Sinescope*, *Skein Spittoon*, *The Tusculum Review*, *The Volta*, and *Xantippe*.

“Letter for Gabriella, or How To Leave New York” is for Gabriella Torres.

“No Parents No Rules” is adapted from an artist statement written for the 21 Grand reading series. It uses lines from Ted Berrigan, *Over the Edge* (1979), David Shapiro, Paul Celan, The Clash, T.S. Eliot, and Philip Whalen.

“Behind the R” incorporates quotes, sometimes unattributed, from Slavoj Žižek, Joseph Lease, Walt Whitman, Jonathan Lethem, and Greil Marcus and was previously published as a chapbook by ypolita press. Thank you, Carrie Hunter.

“Memorial” is for John Oberschmidt.

“September Requiem” appeared as a Binge Press Instant Mini Chapbook. Thank you JodiAnn Stevenson.

“False Spring” was previously published as a chapbook by Spooky Girlfriend Press and is dedicated to Nick Starr and in memory of Wanda Lown and Sean Stennet. Thank you Nate Logan.

“Hold It Down (for N & K)” is for Nathan Hauke and Kirsten Jorgenson.

Thank you to Bruce Covey, Laura Theobald, and Dietmar Krumrey for making this book happen. Thanks too to Evie Shockley, Laura Solomon, Amy King, and Jordan Davis. And thanks always to the support of Bruce, Nick Starr, Cathy and Jim Myers, Hazel McClure, Gabriella Torres, Nikki Flaming, and the Atlanta lit scene.

About the Author

Gina Myers is the author of *A Model Year* (Coconut Books, 2009). Originally from Michigan, she now lives in Atlanta, GA.